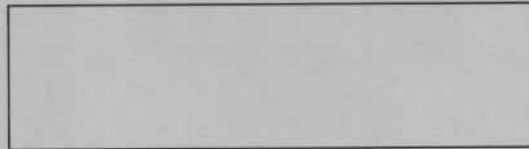


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## Harvesting Ice In The Brighton Area

When we can fill a glass with perfectly shaped ice cubes at the touch of a finger, we are rarely concerned with how this commodity arrived in our home. This was not always the case.

In the process of building farm buildings in the 19th century, a cold storage facility was often included. Perishable food was kept cold in a cool, dark cellar, placed in containers in nearby springs (if available) or lowered into a well pit. Construction of an onsite icehouse meant having your own supply of ice nearby. This made cold food preservation much easier for the farmer's wife.

This area's many ponds and lakes, after the ice was about 6 inches or more thick, provided a source of the needed commodity. Individual farm owners used various equipment to cut, move and place the ice in their icehouse. A quantity of sawdust or marsh hay, was cut and laid between blocks of ice to prevent them sticking together.

However, ice harvesting was a much larger commercial enterprise than merely for personal use. The majority did not have this kind of access to ice. They depended on ice companies for their supply. Ice companies contracted with distributors in cities with large populations, such as Detroit and Toledo, to supply ice year round. Large blocks of ice, twenty five to fifty pounds and larger, were brought in horse-drawn delivery wagons to the ice box at home.

The Huron River, Worden Lake, Island Lake, Whitmore Lake, Silver Lake, Lime Lake and the millpond in town, all were sources of ice. Most of these were near railroads, often with special sidings, where huge storage facilities were built.

Hundreds of men found winter employment in the cleaning of the lake surface, and the marking, cutting and poling the resultant blocks of ice to a ramp, which carried them up onto plat-

forms where they were pushed and pulled into place. Other men saw to the interlaying of insulation between the blocks.

The ice harvesters were not the only ones earning a wage. Local boarding houses flourished, saloons, restaurants, clothing stores, horse feed dealers, hotels and others benefited from this winter activity. Many found work all summer loading ice into railroad cars for shipment. Refrigeration made possible transportation of fruit and other perishables on the railroad. Railroads had a wider clientele and farmers could diversify their agricultural pursuits.

Ice cut on Worden Lake was delivered to the Eastern House in 1850. The ramp on the west side of the millpond sent ice into the large icehouse on shore. The Beaubian Ice Company, at Island Lake, supplied ice to the National Guard encampment there. In 1890, the Labadie Ice Company had acquired Beaubian; Labadie later sold in 1918. Ice stored in the Peach icehouse on Silver Lake was a popular commodity for local resorters. The Toledo Ice House on the northwest shore of Whitmore Lake, burned down around 1930.

A clipping dated March 16, 1932, reveals local concern after a warm winter. However, though ice on Lime Lake was only six and a half inches thick, Don Leith Sr. of the Brighton Ice Company assured this would be held for emergency use since artificial ice was available. Even with the arrival of artificially made ice in the 19th century (using an ammonia condensing process), the harvesting of less expensive ice from nearby lakes continued until WWII.

*Compiled by Marieanna Bair from book "From Settlement to City - Brighton" by Carol McMacken and Yesteryears of Green Oak Township Historical Society. Additions/corrections requested. 810/229-6402.*